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WRITING, A THINKING PROCESS.

BY- ARAPOFF, NANCY

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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A NEW METHOD OF TEACHING WRITING TO STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS PRESENTED. THE AUTHOR DEFINES LEARNING TO WRITE, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER LANGUAGE SKILLS (ORAL PRODUCTION, GRAMMAR, AND READING), AS A PROCESS THAT REQUIRES ACTIVE THOUGHT IN THE NECESSARY SELECTION AND ORGANIZATION OF EXPERIENCE. WRITING INSTRUCTION, THEREFORE, MUST INCLUDE EXERCISES NECESSITATING INTENSE CONCENTRATION. IN PLANNING A WRITING CURRICULUM THE FOLLOWING POINTS SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND--(1) GRAMMAR AND READING ARE NOT GOALS IN THEMSELVES BUT INDISPENSIBLE TOOLS, (2) WRITING HAS CERTAIN STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES FROM SPEECH, AND (3) FREE COMPOSITION OFTEN RESULTS IN WORD-FOR-WORD TRANSLATION AND UNGRAMMATICAL RESULTS. THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WRITING MAY BE CONTROLLED BY CONTROLLING THE PURPOSE OF THE WRITING. THE THREE GENERAL TYPES OF EXPOSITORY PROSE MOST USED IN CLASSROOMS ARE--(1) LECTURE AND READING NOTES WHICH REPORT FACTS, (2) ANSWERS TO EXAMINATION QUESTIONS WHICH EXPLAIN THEM, AND (3) RESEARCH OR CRITICAL PAPERS WHICH EVALUATE. EACH OF THESE THREE PURPOSES REQUIRES A SELECTING AND ORGANIZING TASK OF DIFFERING COMPLEXITY. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE VARIOUS STAGES OF WRITING FROM SIMPLE TO COMPLEX ARE GIVEN. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE TESOL CONVENTION, APRIL 1967, AND IS PUBLISHED IN THE "TESOL QUARTERLY," VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2, JUNE 1967, INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20007. (AMM)

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Business correspondence should be addressed to James E. Alatis, Institute of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

*Writing: A Thinking Process**

Nancy Arapoff

Why teaching writing is different from teaching other language skills.

For some years linguists have been writing textbooks designed to teach foreign students spoken English. But only recently, as teachers have found that many students want and need to learn how to write English as well as to speak it, have linguistically-oriented textbooks designed to teach written English appeared. These textbooks have a number of approaches, from variations on the "copybook" method at one end of the spectrum to the "free composition" method at the other end. No doubt most of you have tried some of these approaches, and, I suspect, found all of them lacking in some way. In my experience, this lack has always been in efficiency. None of the textbooks so far published seems to teach anything that cannot be learned from other ESOL courses: from courses in oral production, grammar, or reading.

Obviously, grammar, aural comprehension, reading, and even oral production are to varying degrees involved in writing. Certainly we cannot teach a writing course which never touches on these areas. But at the same time teaching a writing course which covers *only* these areas is redundant. Given the limited time most of us have to teach students as much as we can about English, we ought to, if purely for efficiency's sake, use a method which teaches the students something they will not learn in their other courses; something they cannot learn from conscientiously translating vocal symbols into orthographic ones, from oral or written pattern practice, or from reading; i.e., a method which emphasizes that which is *unique* to writing.

Writing is much more than an orthographic symbolization of speech; it is, most importantly, *a purposeful selection and organization of experience.* By experience I mean all thoughts—facts, opinions, or ideas—whether acquired first-hand (through direct perceptions and/or actions) or second-hand (through reading or hearsay). This includes all kinds of writing from the poem to the scientific experiment, for all have a purpose and an organized body of selected facts, opinions, or ideas. How clear the purpose, and how relevant and well-organized the facts, determines the effectiveness of the writing.

Since, then, learning to write does not just involve learning to use orthographic symbols, but primarily how to select and organize experience according to a certain purpose, it follows that teaching our students to write is different in a very important way from teaching them to speak or teaching them to use grammar. A purposeful selection and organization of experience requires *active thought.* When writing, the students must keep in mind their purpose, think about the facts they will need to select which are relevant to that purpose, and think about how to organize those facts in a coherent fashion. The process of learn-

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Mrs. Arapoff is an instructor at the English Language Institute, University of Hawaii.

ing to write is largely a process of learning to think more clearly.

On the other hand, learning to speak and learning grammar essentially involve learning *not* to think. The goal is to form habits; the procedure is to drill the students on pronunciation or grammar to the point where they will no longer have to think about what they are saying. It is more than likely that the habit-forming process which students of oral English and grammar must go through *interferes* with the process of learning to write well.

And the students don't learn to write via a reading course either. Although, unlike pronunciation and grammatical production, the process of reading requires thought, it does not, as does writing, also require *activity*. Reading is a passive process while writing is active. Although they can learn through reading how various writers have selected and organized facts in order to carry out a specific purpose, the students themselves must ultimately be forced to undergo the intense mental activity involved in working out their own problems of selection and organization if they are ever really going to learn to write. This is why the copybook approach, which requires that the students copy or emulate certain writings, doesn't work very well, for while it does require that the students memorize structures, thereby increasing their grammatical ability, and perhaps even teaching them something about style, it does not require them to do much thinking.

Because the combination of thought and activity are unique to writing, we must in planning a writing curriculum devise exercises which necessitate intense concentration. While grammar and reading are both certainly indispensable to such a curriculum, they must be presented in such a way that students will learn to use them as tools. For example, one of the first things they will have to learn is that writing has certain structural differences from speech. One difference is that writing generally has longer sentences—what might be two or three sentences in speech is often only one sentence in writing. So the students should learn how to combine the short sentences of spoken English by modification, or by using sentence connectors of various kinds (conjunctions, words like *however*, *therefore*, phrases like *in the first place*, etc.). This involves learning grammar, but the students should learn to *consciously* select and use various grammatical devices with which to combine sentences as the problems arise in a writing situation: e.g., when they convert a dialog or narration into a paraphrase.

Of course, one of the biggest problems in teaching writing is that the students must have facts and ideas in order to write and that these must be manifested in the form of grammatical English sentences. But if we allow them to use the facts and ideas gained from their first-hand experiences, they will think of these in their own language and then try to translate them word-for-word into English, often with most ungrammatical results. This is why the free composition approach to teaching writing is just as unsatisfactory as the copybook method, but in a different way. The students make so many grammatical errors that their compositions lose much of the original meaning.

We can, however, avoid the prob-

lems caused by the students' limited knowledge of grammar and of the idioms of English by requiring that instead of using the facts of first-hand experience, they use second-hand facts gained through the vicarious experience of reading. Since what is unique in learning to write is not so much learning to *state* facts as it is to *use* them, we can *give* our students the facts they will be required to use in the form of reading assignments. By using sentences gleaned from reading they can avoid making grammatical errors and actively concentrate on the purposeful selection and organization of these sentences; i.e., they can concentrate on thinking.

A New Method for Teaching Writing

Contending, then, that learning to write is a process whereby students learn to use grammar and facts as tools in carrying out a particular purpose, we are confronted with the question of precisely how we are going to teach them to do this. Obviously, just as writing is a process, so too is the teaching of writing. We must proceed by stages from simple to complex. Because we cannot expect students to learn all there is to learn about writing at once, or even in a short time, we must in some way control the complexity of the writing they will be expected to do at various learning stages.

We can do this by controlling the *purpose* of the writing, for it is largely the purpose the writer must implement which determines the complexity of the selecting and organizing process. While a purpose of some sort is inherent in any kind of writing, it is the writing with an explicit rather than an implicit purpose that we should teach: i.e., expository prose. This kind of writing, because it "exposes" its purpose, lends itself much more easily to analysis than does writing with an implicit purpose (i.e., "fiction" or "literature" or "creative writing"), and therefore it is easier to teach. Too, expository prose is the only kind of writing that the students will need to use in their school work (except for assignments given in certain specialized English courses). Finally, the students will learn a great deal about *all* kinds of writing from learning to write good expository prose.

There are roughly three types of expository prose that students regularly use in school: these are lecture and reading notes, answers to examination questions, and research or critical papers. Each type has a different general purpose: note-taking is intended to *report* the facts, answering exam questions to *explain* them, and paper-writing to *evaluate* them. Each purpose—reporting, explaining, and evaluating—requires a selecting and organizing task of differing complexity.

For example, a student whose assignment is to summarize an essay has a purpose of the first type: reporting. His summary might begin with an assertion like: "The essay 'We Shall Overcome' says that the Negro is slowly making gains in status." This assertion tells us that the writer will use facts selected from the essay which exemplify the Negro's gain in status and that he will organize them in much the same order as they appeared in the essay.

But a student asked in an essay exam to write on, say, the types of

gains in status the Negro has made must go through a more complicated process of selection and organization. His beginning statement might read: "The essay, 'We Shall Overcome' lists gains in status the Negro is making which can be classified as either material or spiritual," and he will have to explain the facts he selects by organizing them into two categories—a more complex process than reporting, requiring deeper thought.

An assignment which requires that the student write a paper giving his opinion of an essay necessitates a still more complicated selecting and organizing process. He will have to begin with an assertion like: "The essay 'We Shall Overcome' is a realistic appraisal of the Negro's gain in status," and then he will have to cite evidence making a case for his opinion; i.e., he will have to evaluate the facts.

The curriculum for writing, then, should be planned in accordance with the three general types of expository prose the students will need to use in school: prose which reports, prose which explains, and prose which evaluates. Of course such a task isn't simple. Teaching beginners or near-beginners in English how to summarize, for example, is not a one-step process. Before they can do this successfully, they must learn to recognize structural and semantic clues which identify the important ideas within a given piece of prose. And the most efficient way for them to learn to do this (if we remember that writing involves the unique combination of thought and activity) is by having them use such clues in their own writing. Similarly, teaching reasonably sophisticated students how to write essays involves the complex process of teaching them how to find topics and sub-topics, how to recognize relevant similarities or differences between facts, and how to make assertions about their findings. Finally, teaching even advanced students how to judge various written pieces on a logical basis is a very involved process which includes teaching them to recognize the two parts of an argument, how to look for fallacies in these, and how to compose their own logically sound arguments.

So, although there may be only three general types of expository prose, teaching these is a long process which takes the students through several stages of writing, beginning with a form very close to speech—direct address—and ending with a form very different—a footnoted thesis. Naturally, as the purpose of the writing becomes more complex, the facts that the students are given to use must become more complex also. However, the teaching process can be most clearly illustrated by showing how the facts from one simple six-line dialog could be used in all stages of writing, from simple to complex:

Bill: Hi, Mary.
Mary: Hi.
Bill: Where are you going?
Mary: To the beach. Why don't you come along?
Bill: I think it's going to rain. Look at those clouds.
Mary: It *can't* rain again today! It's rained every day this week.

Direct Address

"Hi, Mary," said Bill.
"Hi," the girl answered.
"Where are you going?" he asked.
"To the beach," Mary replied. "Why don't you come along?"
"I think it's going to rain." Bill

pointed. "Look at those clouds."

"It *can't* rain again today!" his friend exclaimed. "It's rained every day this week."

Narration

Bill greeted Mary.

Mary greeted Bill.

He asked her where she was going.

She said that she was going to the beach. She asked Bill to go along.

He answered that he thought it was going to rain. He told Mary to look at the clouds.

Mary said that it couldn't rain again that day. It had rained every day that week.

Paraphrase

Exchanging greetings with Mary, Bill asked her where she was going. She said that she was going to the beach, and asked Bill to go along; however, he said that he thought it was going to rain, and told Mary to look at the clouds. But Mary said that it couldn't rain again that day because it had rained every day that week.

Summary

When Mary asked Bill to go to the beach with her, he said that he thought it was going to rain, and told her to look at the clouds. However, she said that it couldn't rain again that day since it had rained every day that week.

Factual analysis

Topic #1: Mary

1. Mary asked Bill to go to the beach with her.
2. She said that it couldn't rain again that day since it had rained every day that week.

Topic #2: Bill

1. Bill thougt it was going to rain.
2. He told Mary to look at the clouds.

Assertion

Bill and Mary had opposite ideas about the weather: he was a pessimist and she was an optimist.

Essay

"THE PESSIMIST VS. THE OPTIMIST"

Bill and Mary had opposite ideas about the weather: he was a pessimist and she was an optimist.

When Mary asked Bill to go to the beach with her one day, he was very pessimistic, telling her that he thought it was going to rain, and to look at the clouds. On the other hand, Mary was optimistic. She said that it couldn't rain again that day since it had rained every day that week.

People like Bill, who notice clouds in the sky, are pessimists, while people like Mary, who don't notice them, are optimists.

Argumentative analysis

Argument #1: premise—there are clouds in the sky; conclusion—it is going to rain.

Argument #2: premise—it has rained every day this week; conclusion—it can't rain again today.

Evaluation of the arguments

Argument #1 is reasonably sound: the evidence is both verifiable and relevant although the conclusion may be somewhat hasty. Argument #2 is fallacious: the evidence is verifiable but irrelevant, or, if relevant, leads to an opposite conclusion.

Critical review

In the essay "The Pessimist vs. The Optimist" by ———— in ————, Bill argued that it was going to rain because there were clouds in the sky, while Mary disagreed saying that it couldn't rain again that day because it had rained every day that week. Bill's argument was stronger than Mary's.

Bill's evidence was both verifiable and relevant. He said that there were clouds, which anyone could immediately verify by looking toward the sky. Since rain occurs only when there are clouds, certainly the evidence—clouds in the sky—was relevant to the conclusion that it was going to rain. However, the conclusion may have been somewhat hasty; it does not always rain when there are clouds. But Bill's argument was reasonably sound.

On the other hand, Mary's argument was fallacious. Her evidence, like Bill's was verifiable: one could check with the Weather Bureau. But from the fact that it had rained every day that week it did not follow that it therefore could *not* rain again that day; the evidence was irrelevant. In fact, a stronger logical case could have been made for the opposite conclusion: that because it had rained every other day that week, it would also rain that day, since in some areas there is a rainy season during which it rains almost every day.

Therefore, Bill's argument was sounder than Mary's, and from the evidence given in the essay, the chances for rain that day were higher than the chances for a good beach day.

Term paper

Contrasting Opinions About Weather

People are often either pessimists or optimists about the weather. Evidence of this is widespread. One example is the case of Bill and Mary in the essay "The Pessimist vs. the Optimist"[1]. . .

Each of the above samples of writing is, of course, the product of several lessons and "practices." Even learning to convert a dialog into what appears to be a simple form—direct address—involves learning a number of concepts about punctuation, about speaker identification, about stylistic variety. Learning to write a narration involves learning to change verbs to other tenses, to change first and second person pronouns to third person, to change words like *now* and *here* to *then* and *there*, and so forth. A given lesson, then, is designed to teach just a few of many concepts that the students need to learn at a certain stage of the writing process.

The following two lessons appear in the mimeographed text—REPORTING THE FACTS—which we are now using at the University of Hawaii, and they illustrate how learning to write can be a step-by-step process, but at the same time an active, thinking one:

LESSON 10

1. Compare the two models below.

Narration:

Liz called Mary. She told her that it was almost nine o'clock. They had better drive to school.

Mary told Liz that her car had a flat tire. They would have to walk. They would probably be late.

Liz said that she didn't mind being late. They needed the exercise. It would be good for them to walk.

Paraphrase:

Liz called Mary, and told her that it was almost nine o'clock, so they had better drive to school. Mary told Liz that her car had a flat tire; therefore they would have to walk. They would probably be late as a result. Liz said that she didn't mind being late; besides, they needed the exercise, so it would be good for them to walk.

2. In what ways are *so, therefore,* and *as a result* similar in grammatical usage to *and, in addition,* and *besides?*
3. *Therefore* and *as a result* occur in the same position and have the same punctuation. How does *so* compare with them in this?
4. What are some other sentences that can be connected by *so, therefore,* and *as a result*?
5. Make a paraphrase out of the narration below. Use *so/therefore/as a result* as well as *and/in addition/besides* where appropriate.

Liz asked Mary how she liked French I. She asked her if she was planning to take French II the following semester.

Mary said that the teacher gave them a lot of homework. She had to stay up late doing it. It was difficult. They also had to memorize a long list of words for

each lesson. She didn't like French I. She wasn't going to take French II.

Liz said that she had been thinking of taking French. She was glad Mary had warned her about it. She thought she would take Spanish instead.

LESSON 11

1. Compare the two models below:

Paraphrase #1:

Liz called Mary, and told her that it was almost nine o'clock, so they had better drive to school. Mary told Liz that her car had a flat tire; therefore they would have to walk. They would probably be late as a result. Liz said that she didn't mind being late; besides, they needed the exercise, so it would be good for them to walk.

Paraphrase #2:

Liz called Mary, and told her that they had better drive to school, for it was almost nine o'clock. Mary told Liz that because her car had a flat tire, and since they would have to walk, they would probably be late. Liz said that she didn't mind being late; besides, it would be good for them to walk because they needed the exercise.

2. What are the differences in the grammatical usage of *therefore/as a result* and *because/since*?
3. In what ways are *and*, *so*, and *for* similar?
4. *For/because/since* and *so/therefore/as a result* indicate a cause-effect relationship between two sentences or clauses. Which words occur within a sentence stating the cause? The effect?
5. What is the *time* relationship of a cause to an effect?
6. Which of the following three sentences states a cause? An effect? *Both* a cause *and* an effect? *Mary told Liz that her car had a flat tire. They would have to walk. They would probably be late.*
7. What are some ways of writing the above three sentences using one or more of the six cause-effect sentence connectors?
8. *For/because/since* and *so/therefore/as a result* do not occur in the same cause-effect relationship, but they can occur in the same sentence. Why? Give an example.
9. Rewrite the paraphrase you did for Lesson 10. Use *for/because/since* instead of *so/therefore/as a result*. Make all of the necessary changes in punctuation and word order.

Lessons like these, then, are designed to teach only a small amount of the writing process at a time, but to teach it in such a way that the students learn to think more and more actively as they progress. They learn to read more carefully than they have in the past, for they must compare two similar but slightly different models, noting the grammatical and semantic differences between them. And they learn to discover reasons for these differences as they answer the questions following the readings. They learn to review constantly in order to compare and contrast previous lessons with the current one. Finally, they learn to make analogies as they work with an entirely different model, deciding whether their changes in the new model are justifiable on the basis of changes made in the old model.

As they go through the lessons, then, the students learn that grammar and semantics are inter-related, and that they are important tools for them to use consciously in order to make coherent pieces of prose out of different sets of English sentences. In short, they learn, first and foremost, that writing is a thinking process.